DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 141 928 95 EA 009 740

AUTHOR Nelson, Hal; And Others
TITLE Alternative Education and the Single-Parent Family.
INSTITUTION Educational Services Group, Inc., Minneapolis, Minn.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Apr 76
CONTRACT 400-76-0005
NOTE 79p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$4.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Alternative Schools; Bus Transportation; Demography; Economic Factors; *Educational Alternatives; Educational Environment; Educational Innovation; Educational Research; Elementary Education; Experimental Schools; Interviews; *Needs Assessment; *One Parent Family; *Parent Attitudes; Parent Participation; Research Problems; School Services

ABSTRACT

The impact of providing alternative styles of education to single-parent families was analyzed as part of an experimental program, Southeast Alternatives (SEA), in Minneapolis, Minnesota. SEA is one of 18 experimental schools projects funded by the National Institute of Education to test innovations in educational practice in a long-term systemwide experiment. The study entailed identification of the universe of single-parent families with children attending the four SEA schools, and one other elementary school; coding residential and demographic characteristics available from school records; and interviewing a 15 percent sample, proportionately stratified by school, of single parents with children in the four elementary programs. Interviews with 60 single-parents provide a profile of single-parent families in the community, and their attitudes about the benefits and shortcomings of alternative schooling. Demographic characteristics of the single-parents are reported; and based on the parents' attitudes toward the schools, a number of practical solutions intended for both educational planners and public policy makers are suggested. (Author/MLF)

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ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

AND

THE SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY

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April 1976

Submitted to the
National Institute of Education
pursuant to Contract No. 400-76-0005

EA 009 740

The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the National Institute of Education and no official endorsement should be inferred.

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION 1

II. SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES AND EDUCATION 10

III. SCOPE OF THIS STUDY 14

IV. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES 20

V. USE OF ALTERNATIVES 32

VI. ATTITUDES ABOUT ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION 37

VII. ESSENTIAL SERVICES 43

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 59

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY STUDY 66

REFERENCES 73

FIGURES

Figure 1: Children Enrolled in SEA Elementary Programs by Family Status..... 21

Figure 2: Percent of Elementary Students from Single-Parent Homes..... 22

Figure 3: Number of Children at Home in Single-Parent Family Interview Sample..... 23

Figure 4: Residential Characteristics of SEA Elementary Families..... 24

Figure 5: Residential Characteristics of Tuttle Families..... 25

Figure 6: Residential Characteristics of Marcy Families..... 26

Figure 7: Residential Characteristics of Pratt Families..... 27

Figure 8: Residential Characteristics of Motley Families..... 28

Figure 9: Residence Area of Single-Parent Families in Interview Sample..... 29

Figure 10: Ages of Heads of Households in Single-Parent Family Interview Sample..... 30

Figure 11: Sex of Heads of Households in Single-Parent Family Interview Sample..... 30

Figure 12: (Non)-Marital Status of Heads of Households in Single-Parent Family Interview Sample..... 30

Figure 13: Modes of Transportation of Single-Parent Families in Interview Sample..... 31

Figure 14: Use of Alternatives: Number of Single-Parent Families Sending Children to Alternatives by Residence Area..... 33

Figure 15: Use of Alternatives: Number of Two-Parent Families Sending Children to Alternatives by Residence Area..... 33

Figure 16: Use of Non-Local Alternative Schools by Single-Parent and Two-Parent Families..... 34

Figure 17: Use of Alternatives by Two-Parent and One-Parent Families.... 34

Figure 18: Use of Alternatives: Number of Single-Parent Families Sending Children to Alternatives by Non-SEA Residence Area... 35

Figure 19: Use of Alternatives: Number of Two-Parent Families Sending Children to Alternatives by Non-SEA Residence Area... 35

Figure 20: Reasons for Selection of Alternatives..... 41

Figure 21: Involvement in Program of Alternative Schools..... 41

Figure 22: Family Incomes of Single-Parent Families in Interview Sample..... 44

Figure 23: Sources of Income of SEA Single Parents in Interview Sample.. 46

Figure 24: Occupations of Single Parents in Interview Sample..... 47

Figure 25: Use of Public Assistance Programs by Single Parents in Interview Sample..... 49

Hanging and wiving go by
destiny.

— Shakespeare

I. INTRODUCTION

Being a single parent is a bit like having epilepsy--everyone knows you have a problem but no one understands it, except perhaps another "victim." Despite the efforts of Parents Without Partners (membership 80,000) and a large number of other organizations, single-parent status is still widely regarded as an abnormal state. Those with reasonable incomes pay a higher rate of taxes than married persons, despite considerably higher costs for domestic maintenance and child raising; those with inadequate incomes are often forced by economics into degrading or stigmatized circumstances, such as "welfare" and public housing, and not infrequently into a cycle of hard-core poverty that may become the norm for children and grandchildren. Single parentage is often blamed for juvenile delinquency--even though the limited reliable research on the subject is highly qualified, suggesting that a number of other variables may account for the relationship (Herzog and Sudia, 1968:178). Many communities and groups regard single adults as a threat to intact domestic relationships, the feeling being that they are by nature predatory as a result of their mate-deprivation. School personnel are inclined to relate behavioral difficulties in children to "broken home" situations, even though intact but tense or openly hostile parental relationships are often more upsetting to children than parental separation. The Minneapolis Public Schools until recently sent to parents a "Family Status Information"

form for the student cumulative files. The form asked parents to indicate "Family status: normal, separated, divorced, remarried, widowed (underline one)." Use of the form was abandoned after many single parents expressed their resentment over the implication of abnormality.

The existing literature on single-parent families, while improving, is yet very inadequate. In general, it is heavily sex-biased, biased toward particular theoretical viewpoints, spotty in terms of coverage, and rife with methodological problems. Data obtained in one social context are often extrapolated to a radically different situation. "Oranges and apples" type comparisons are made between sets of families and/or children.

Most of the existing literature supports what Herzog and Sudia (1968) have termed the "classic" position, that single parentage has a deleterious effect upon children. They found that among 59 research studies investigating effects of continued absence of the father, "29 studies supported the classic view that fatherless homes are associated with adverse characteristics or behavior in the child; 17 challenge this position; and 13 report mixed conclusions" (Herzog and Sudia, 1968:178).

The research reports were rated for their methodological soundness and only seven from each of the "classic" and the "challenge" groups were found acceptable:

> The count cannot be taken too seriously because aspects investigated and conclusions reached were so varied and so fragmentary. Most studies of fatherless homes look at only one area, or, typically, only a few slices of information within one area. It is interesting, however, that in the overall count the "classic" view wins handily, but among the studies rated acceptable in method, the rough score is a tie: seven for and seven against the classic view. The acceptable group comprises a larger proportion of those challenging than of those supporting the classic view. (Herzog and Sudia, 1968:178)

The types of methodological problems differ from one study to another, also. Some stem from a lack of adequate controls. Deutsch and Brown (1964), for example, found lower average scores on the Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Test among father-absent first and fifth-graders than among their two-parented peers. Their results indicated poorer relative performance among fifth-graders than among first-graders, suggesting a cumulative effect. However, there was no control for when (i.e., age of child) the father became absent. Some problems of method are, however, far more blatant. Phelps (1969), in a paper too recent to fall into the Herzog-Sudia count, reports findings that single parents (mothers) are more conservative and authoritarian in child-rearing practices than mothers in two-parent families. On the basis of seven significant scales out of 23 items on the Parent Attitude Research Instrument, he noted:

> One-parent mothers tended to have a more rigid attitude toward allowing their children the freedom to express aggression, to learn about sex, and in exposing the child to adult influences from outside the home. In addition, mothers in one-parent families took a much firmer stand in blaming adult males for their domestic problems. Finally, the one-parent mothers expected more rapid physical and psychological development of their children than two-parent mothers.
>
> Since higher scale scores indicate a more "liberal" and "enlightened" attitude toward child-rearing practices, the two-parent groups could be said to reflect a more liberal view on the twenty-three attitudes than the one-parent families. (Phelps, 1969:415)

However, Phelps' two-parent family sample was drawn from Berkeley, California; his one-parent family sample from Omaha, Nebraska. It does not require a great deal of intuition to realize that parents in Berkeley, of either one- or two-parent families, are likely to be more liberal than those in Omaha. If Phelps had compared one- and two-parent families in either or

both locations, his conclusions may have had merit. As it is they are comparisons of the "oranges-apples" sort.

There are, of course, a fair number of papers which present conclusions based upon methodologically sound research. Many of these are nonetheless biased by the kinds of questions and/or categories of research subjects which they address. The titles of articles reflect this bias: "Father availability and academic performance among third grade boys" (Blanchard and Biller, 1971); "The effect of father absence on male children in the home and school" (Atkinson and Ogston, 1974); "Effect of early father absence on scholastic aptitude" (Carlsmith, 1964); "Father absence and its relationship to creativity" (Becker, 1974). The literature overwhelmingly emphasizes the impact of male parents' absence from the home, and tends also to concentrate upon the effects on male rather than female (or both male and female) children. One might be tempted to suggest that the former emphasis is an artifact of the proportionally greater number of female-headed than male-headed single-parent families. However, the emphasis of effects upon boys is indicative of a psychoanalytic theoretical bias.

The starting point for many investigations is the Freudian assumption that masculine maturational development depends upon a strong male role model:

> Generally, most investigations have focused on father absence as it influences personality development in male children. The impetus for much of the research arises from the psychoanalytic position that a male child deprived of a father or father figure will experience difficulty achieving necessary sex-role identification and, consequently, will develop behavior insufficiently masculine for appropriate adjustment. (Atkinson and Ogston, 1974:213)

Studies finding detrimental effects of father absence upon children have dealt with aggression (Sears, Pintler and Sears, 1946; Sears, 1951); masculine self-concept and/or maturation (Biller and Bahm, 1971; Biller, 1968); achievement motivation (Blanchard and Biller, 1971); cognitive styles (Carlsmith, 1964); juvenile delinquency (Sterne, 1964); and moral development (Santrock, 1975; Hoffman, 1971; McCord, McCord and Thurber, 1962; Siegmann, 1966). The male bias of most of these works is reflected in some of the basic assumptions made in interpreting data. Carlsmith (1964), for example, noted that fatherless boys have generally higher verbal ability than problem-solving skills, and suggests that this pattern represents their having adopted a feminine cognitive style. (The implication here is that problem-solving ability is linked to a male sex role.) Blanchard and Biller (1971) suggest that father-availability provides boys (they were not concerned with girls) with an appropriate motivation model: "Highly available fathers seem to afford their sons models of perseverance and achievement motivation." There is no indication in Blanchard and Biller's work whether highly available mothers might provide their sons (or daughters) with the same model. It would seem that the constraints of research design and questions asked are instrumental in producing particular kinds of results, especially those relating to sex of parent and children in single-parent families. There are virtually no studies which deal with children of male-headed single-parent families. The interest in Oedipal themes in female-headed units is not matched by an Electra-complex fascination in male-headed single-parent families.

A number of articles have also shown no significant differences, or equivocated differences, between children of single-parent and two-parent families in the areas discussed above. In relation to self-concept development, Kelly (1970) found:

> It was concluded that the emotional growth of children is not necessarily dependent upon the presence within the home of both parents but that residence with at least one parent is vital. The effectiveness of institutions in fostering healthy adjustment in the children they serve is open to serious question and doubt.
>
> Forward movement for these institutions might then be directed towards placement of all parent-deprived children in adoptive homes. Certainly placement with two parents would be ideal; however, on the basis of the findings of the present study, placement with one parent would also serve to satisfy the ego needs of these deprived children. Since the existence and quality of individualized attention rather than the quantity of that attention emerges as the crucial factor in healthy ego development, adoption by single adults would be far more realistic in terms of the number of people eligible and the number of children reached. (Kelly, 1970:47)

Atkinson and Ogston (1974) compared a substantial number of variables involving discipline, home and school activities, and cooperation between father absent and father present boys. While single mothers perceived certain discipline problems (e.g., destructive behavior) as warranting more severe punishment than mothers in two-parent families, their sons perceived their punishment as less severe than that reported by two-parented boys. Other differences were similarly equivocated. Atkinson and Ogston suggest that disciplinary patterns may vary according to paternal presence and absence, but note:

> It appears on the basis of these results that the behavior of children without fathers is neither more nor less deviant than that of children having fathers. They performed as well scholastically, generally participated in as many activities, and appeared to be equally cooperative and responsible around the home. (Atkinson and Ogston, 1974:220)

Herzog and Sudia (1972:177-78) point out that most studies of masculine identity rely upon scales which differentiate between boys and girls, but "add up to dubious definitions of masculinity and femininity,"

adding a parenthetical note: "A study of the items suggests that Stalin or Al Capone would look much better on a typical M-F scale than would Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, or Neil Armstrong." Herzog and Sudia also suggest that correlations between father absence and juvenile delinquency may be artifacts of research done in institutional settings and of intervening variables such as income and residential conditions. They add further:

> Analysis of such studies suggest that if, in fact, father-absent children are overrepresented among those who engage in delinquent behavior (as differentiated from those represented in official delinquency statistics), the direct and primary causes lie in the precursors, concomitants and consequences of father absence: stress and conflict within the home, inability of the mother to exercise adequate supervision, depressed income and living conditions (including exposure to unfavorable neighborhood influences), the mother's psychological and behavioral reactions to her situation as a solo parent, and community attitudes that sometimes operate as self-fulfilling prophecies. Such a speculation is reinforced by the likelihood that divorce, separation and desertion may be preceded by periods of acute stress, and that supervision of children is likely to be more difficult for a mother in a one-parent than in a two-parent home. (Herzog and Sudia, 1972:179)

Herzog and Sudia make clear that, while the situation of father-absent children may not be as bad as it has been portrayed, single mothers face greater energy and emotional demands than mothers in two-parent families:

> Each facet of the impact of father absence on the present mother is likely to affect other facets. The emotional impact affects her coping ability. The social impact affects the emotional impact. The economic impact is likely to affect any or all other facets. And all together impose a drain on the physical and psychological energy available for meeting her children's needs. The low health and energy levels of solo mothers in poverty have been amply documented, as have the loneliness and anxiety, which breed and are bred by apathy, depression and lethargy. (Herzog and Sudia, 1972:179)

These authors point out that, whatever the situation of one-parent families, a "good" two-parent home is desirable, concluding the argument with the Jewish proverb: "Lack of a father is not as bad as having a good father is good."

The cogency and logic of evidence countermanding and equivocating the "classic" position on single parentage, combined with methodological problems and theoretical biases of articles supporting the "classic" position, is such as to throw open the whole question whether there are detrimental effects of single parentage on children.

An intriguing possibility that there may be positive correlates of single parentage is presented by Becker (1974). Becker's study is most noteworthy in that he takes a position diametrical to that of most theorists on the subject of father-absence. Except for some uncritical and nonsequitur, but apparently serious references to an archetypal "matriarchal" family (a myth still believed in by some psychoanalytic thinkers [e.g., Fromm, 1951] as well as feminist writers who try to explain how women ended up in their present circumstances), Becker presents a well-considered literature review and cogent arguments for the possibility that father-absence may be a positive stimulus to creativity. He then proceeds to describe an experiment intended to test this possibility, as well as the contingency that mother-influence might also account for creativity. Three samples of twenty individuals each were randomly drawn from among a pool of volunteer undergraduate psychology students; these represented: (1) students who had experienced father absence before age twelve; (2) father-present individuals strongly influenced by female parent; and (3) father-present individuals strongly influenced by male parent. Using an "Unusual Uses Test" for creativity, which entailed eliciting different uses of tin cans, Becker compared results for (1) fluency (number of different uses); (2) flexibility (number of different categories used); and (3) originality (number of "uncommon" uses compared to a checklist of "common" uses). He found that

father-absent and father-present female-influenced students were not significantly different from one another, but both groups were substantially higher than father-present male-influenced students on all scales. He interprets this fact as meaning that mother influence is correlated with creativity stimulation.

Becker's study leaves one in the air for two reasons. First, samples drawn from undergraduate psychology classes are likely to be highly self-selected. Second, the meaning of creative uses of tin cans would seem to leave some doubt. At best, Becker has shown that mother-influenced psychology students are more resourceful in their uses of tin cans; at worst, his study points up the need for further research on (1) the relation of creativity to family structure and single parentage; and (2) the possibility that there are heretofore uninvestigated positive effects or correlates of single parentage and/or maternal influence.

The first thing education
teaches you is to walk alone.

— Trader Horn

II. SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

Studies of the relation of single parenthood to education typically address its purported impact upon cognitive skill development--in particular scores on various tests of intelligence and/or basic skills achievement. The same sort of difficulties plague these studies as those discussed above--problems of sampling, methodology, adequate controls and bias. Sciara and Jantz (1974), for example, found that among black fourth-graders, students from father-present homes scored significantly higher on the Metropolitan Achievement Test for reading than did a counterpart group from father-absent homes. They label their conclusions as "tentative," however, because there were no controls for length of time students had been in one-parent homes, or for the socioeconomic status of single-parent families compared to the two-parent group.

The sex-bias toward examining effects of father absence upon boys is also very present in the literature on single parentage and education. Blanchard and Biller (1971), e.g., set up their research design on this premise:

> Previous findings concerning the impact of father absence, and the quality of the father-son relationship on the boy's academic performance are very provocative, but many potentially important factors have not been systematically considered. In the present study, matched groups of early father-absent boys, late father-absent boys, father-present boys with low father availability, and father-present boys with high father availability

> were compared and, in general, it was predicted that degree of father availability would be positively related to academic achievement and to grades. (Blanchard and Biller, 1971:301)

These authors found that teachers' grades and Stanford Achievement Test results for third-graders correlated with father availability. There was not, however, a linear relationship between the four categories. In general "late father-absent" boys did better than "low father-present" boys, including teachers' assigned grades. (The latter would tend to rule against the effect of teacher prejudice in favor of two-parent children.)

Blanchard and Biller interpret their data as supportive of the masculine role image hypothesis discussed in the previous section. However, Jantz and Sciara (1975), looking at arithmetic achievement of black fourth graders, found that "no significant differences were found in mean scores between male and female pupils."

Sutton-Smith, Rosenberg and Landy (1968) examined a number of apparently confounding effects of cognitive skill growth, using ACE college-entrance scores. These were family size, sibling order, sibling sex-status (i.e., same or opposite sex grouping), and age when the father absence occurred. They found these variables to have combined effects, but not in any linear order; for example:

> The sibling composition of the unaffected females (on which there are data) suggests that the possession of a like-sex sibling modifies the effects of father absence. The boy with a younger brother is less affected than the boy with a younger sister, and the girl with a younger sister is less affected than the girl with a younger brother. Furthermore, an only girl is affected by the father's absence, but an only boy is not. (Sutton-Smith, Rosenberg and Landy, 1968:1219)

The trend for finding lower achievement scores among father-absent than among father-present children began with a study of Scottish children by Sutherland (1930). Until recently, there has been little research which might point to another conclusion, even though the studies in this area have been generally sporadic, and non-comparable in terms of age of children studied, sampling procedure, measurement strategies, instrumentation or experimental controls (cf., Santrock, 1972). Some recent evidence, however, suggests that other factors may be operative. One such is the possibility that teacher stereotyping of single-parent family children may lead to lower expectations of them and concomitant lower performance on achievement-related activities:

> The importance of this factor [little research into the effects of father absence at home and in school] must be considered in light of incidental but intriguing findings by Barclay, Stilwell and Barclay (1972). In comparison with father-present elementary school children, father absent children were ranked by their teachers as lower on a number of personality dimensions, in personal and social adjustment, and as considerably handicapped in their own self-estimate of skills. In addition, teachers almost universally expected less personal effort and work from these children. (Atkinson and Ogston, 1974: 214)

By contrast, the latter authors found a general lack of differences between father-absent and father-present children:

> FA children in this study were judged by their teachers to perform as well academically, to participate in as many sports and clubs, and to require no more classroom discipline than FP children. (Atkinson and Ogston, 1974: 219)

It may be worth noting that the children and teachers in the latter study were located in a Canadian plains city, Calgary, Alberta. We know relatively little about differential teacher values and attitudes from one location to another, and the effect of generalizing across national boundaries would be even more uncertain.

Interpretations of existing research, while mostly on the side of academically debilitating results of single-parent family situations, may run counter to this theme. Smith and Scales, for example, cite the usual collections of negative results found by other researchers, then proceed to their own interpretations:

> What most research actually implies, however, is that while children with single parents have special problems, attempts to neatly pidgeonhole their characteristics are too simplistic. Children can be remarkably adaptable, and many develop a means to cope, either on their own or with the support of extended families and neighbors. Many one-parent families are models of a close-knit unity which, in some cases, is a positive reaction to the one-parent situation.

And this advice is offered to educational practitioners:

> Teachers would be well-advised to avoid stereotyping fatherless or motherless children as disturbed or in need of special attention. Stable children could be hurt by a teacher who takes a "poor child" attitude toward them because of their background. When interacting with children from one-parent families, teachers cannot afford to consider them as a group. (Smith and Scales, 1975:84)

> The aim of education should be to convert the mind into a living fountain, and not a reservoir. That which is filled by merely pumping in, will be emptied by pumping out.
>
> — John M. Mason

III. SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

This report addresses an issue which has not been previously discussed in published literature--that is, the impact of providing alternative styles of education to single-parent families. The site of the study is Southeast Minneapolis, where a five-year experiment, Southeast Alternatives, has effectively made alternative schooling available and accessible (through an extensive busing network) to every child in the area.

Educational alternatives serve a variety of purposes and clientele with varied social, economic and philosophic needs. The most obvious function of alternatives is to provide optional styles of schooling to children who (or whose parents) have philosophic or adaptive needs for them. Within a school clientele, however, there exist a number of definable subgroups for which alternatives may help satisfy other kinds of needs. Among these, single parent families appear to constitute a substantial and growing subgroup. Two years of ethnographic research on the four elementary alternatives of Southeast Alternatives (SEA) revealed high incidence of single-parent families at all sites, and further indicated dramatic increases in the number and proportion of children from single-parent families over the course of the project. At the end of the project's third year (spring 1974), the frequencies varied from 25 percent (Contemporary School) to 60 percent (Free School).

Because of the size of this group, it was thought necessary to conduct a separate study of the single-parent family issue.

Southeast Alternatives covers the physical area of Southeast Minneapolis, a triangular section of the city bounded by the Mississippi River, St. Paul and commercial-industrial district which separates it from Northeast Minneapolis. It is one of the oldest sections of the city with historic settlement dating to the 1850's. The University of Minnesota's main campus lies in the heart of the area, surrounded by commercial, milling, industrial and railroad facilities. Two interstate freeways bisect the area, on either side of the University campus. Within the area, there are several discrete residential zones, generally (but not exclusively) related to school attendance areas: (1) the "Como" (after Como Avenue) area, which is the traditional Tuttle School residence area; (2) the "Marcy" area comprised of the combined residence areas of Marcy and Holmes (no longer used as an elementary program) schools; (3) the "Motley" area, including the old attendance area of Motley School; (4) Prospect Park, the traditional attendance area for Pratt School; and (5) the Glendale Housing Project, a public development built in the early 1950's adjacent to Prospect Park, and now regarded as part of the Pratt attendance area. Since 1973, residents of the Cedar-Riverside area adjacent to the University's West Bank campus have had the option of sending children either to an SEA school, or to Seward School in south Minneapolis. The Cedar-Riverside area includes a high-rise New-Town-in-Town development, called Cedar Square West, as well as scattered single and multiple-family residential zones; the West Bank area, in addition to the University Campus, includes two major hospital complexes, St. Mary's

(Roman Catholic) and Fairview (Lutheran), and two other educational facilities, Augsburg College and St. Mary's Junior College.

SEA includes four distinct models of schooling. At the elementary level, these are building-wide alternatives. The Tuttle building is designated as the "contemporary" alternative, with graded levels and self-contained teacher directed classrooms, but with unique patterns of student movement, temporary regrouping for special learning and enrichment activities, and extensive use of interest centers. Pratt School now houses the entire Continuous Progress program, although it was shared with the Motley building. (Pratt was primary, Motley intermediate until Spring, 1974.) Continuous Progress emphasizes tracking students according to individual growth in basic skills, and utilizes "home rooms," and skill-graded regrouping for morning basic skills learning and optative "interest groups" for afternoon enrichment activities. The Open Elementary Program has been housed at Marcy School since the beginning of the project. Several grouping models were attempted in the first two years with final settlement on a series of K-6 "families" each comprised of two adjacent rooms, one with primary-aged, and the other with intermediate-aged, children. Marcy Open School divides the curriculum into "times"--"quiet times" for basic skills study, "activity times" for enrichment activities, or basic skills, at the student's discretion, and "cleanup times." The Free School spans grades K-12 and is now housed in the Motley School building. The Free School offers a large number of "classes," taught by teachers, aides and volunteers, and opted into by individual students, with the help of their advisors. The Free School is divided into three informal levels, primary (roughly grades K-4), middle (5-8), and senior (9-12). Marshall-University High School (MUH) houses the

remaining secondary alternatives, Contemporary, Continuous progress and Open. Only the Open program is a physically discrete entity within the school. Because of the relatively large number of emancipated minors in the district, and consequent difficulties in defining "families" for older students, this study was restricted to families with elementary-aged children.

Southeast Alternatives is one of eighteen experimental schools projects funded by the National Institute of Education to test innovations in educational practice in a long-term system-wide experiment. The project began in July, 1971, and is scheduled to terminate on June 30, 1976. Research on the project, also funded by the NIE, is contracted to Educational Services Group, Inc., a private consulting firm. The mission of the research is to produce data for national educational policy-making and for dissemination to school districts and other potential users.

Single-parent families have a set of special problems many of which impinge upon educational programs. Among them are needs for day-care for pre-school children and before or after school for school-aged children, school lunch support, increased social work and counseling services for children with emotional or parent-identity difficulties, school emergency and parent-teacher conference contacts with working parents. These problems seemed sufficiently substantial to have a potential effect on national educational policy assessment. Consequently, more extensive research on the problem has been undertaken during the last year of the SEA project.

The study entailed two basic operations: (1) identification of the universe of single-parent families with children attending the SEA schools (as well as those attending Seward School from the Cedar-Riverside area), and coding of such residential and demographic characteristics as were

available from school records; (2) interviewing of a 15 per cent sample, proportionately stratified by school, of single parents. The first operation was carried out in October-November, 1975. Three researchers analyzed data on school enrollment forms, attendance cards and school emergency cards, to identify the current family status of all families attending SEA area schools. Discrepancies and cases of insufficient information were checked with school clerks, counselors and community residents; in some cases the researchers' extensive familiarity with the community clarified discrepancies. There were a substantial number of unclear situations which became apparent from comparison of lists; for example, two one-parent families residing together responded to the family emergency form that there were "two parents in the home."—this was nominally true, although they were unrelated female parents of unrelated children. Such a situation was counted as two one-parent families, rather than one two-parent family. There was also confusion as to the meaning of "number of parents in the home" on the emergency card. Some persons entered "0," indicating that there was no one home during the day. If a person entered "1," the question thus remained whether there was only one parent residing in the home or only one parent home during the day. In most cases the school enrollment forms indicated whether the student resided with "both parents," "mother," "father," "mother and stepfather," "father and stepmother," "guardian," etc. Despite careful cross-checking, a small number of errors (three out of about ninety persons contacted) appeared during phoning to arrange interview appointments. Of the three, who claimed not to be single parents, one said that her husband was overseas on "an extended business trip," and another was determined through other information sources to have been periodically separated as a result of her husband's legal difficulties.

The interviews were conducted with at least 15 per cent of single-parents with children in the four elementary programs. Lists of potential interviewees were randomly drawn from each of the schools' single parent populations. Phone contacts were then made sequentially from these lists to schedule interview appointments. The number of interviewees from each school was proportional to the number of single-parent families with children in the school. The sixty interviews were distributed as follows: Tuttle (14); Marcy (19); Pratt (21); Free School (6). The interview schedule is included in the Appendix. Interviews were intended to (1) build a profile of single-parent families in the Southeast school community; and (2) elicit attitudes about alternative schooling and what it does for single-parent families.

Married in haste, we repent
at leisure.

— Congreve

IV. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

Characteristics of "single-parent families" are not easy to define, because they constitute a diverse group. Yet it is a large and growing group:

> Thirteen percent of all children--some 8.3 million--are living in single parent families, and 65% of these parents are working. (Mondale, 1975:14)

These brief statistics, based upon findings of Senate-House hearing conducted in 1974-75 represent a substantial jump in the single-parent family rate from 1970, when seven million (11 per cent) minor children were living in mother-headed households (Current Population Reports, 1971). Of these children, Herzog and Sudia (1972) note:

> Some are white, some are black; some are girls; some are boys; some are teenagers, some are infants; some are very bright, some are not very bright. Some of their mothers are widows; some are divorced, separated, deserted or unmarried; some are wealthy, some make ends meet with difficulty, and more are poor. Some of these children lost their fathers in infancy, some during the middle childhood years or later. Some think about their fathers often, some almost never; and if they do think about them, some do so with tenderness and pride while some think of them with resentment or even rage.
>
> Yet, when people talk about children who grow up in fatherless homes, they often talk as if those seven million children are all alike, with the same problems, the same kind of homes, and the same future life possibilities--as if all seven million could be stowed in one pidgeonhole, neatly labeled, and sealed with a gloomy prognosis. This sounds silly and it is silly, but it is also--to an uncomfortable degree--the way many people talk. (Herzog and Sudia, 1972:175)

This study will attempt to describe the diversities, as well as the similarities, among the single-parent families in Southeast Minneapolis.

At the time that we assembled lists of the families with children in SEA elementary schools, there were a total of 828 families with 1116 children in the equivalents of grades K-6 (Figures 1 and 4) or an average of 1.35 elementary-aged children per family. (Many of these families also has pre-school-aged, secondary and out of school children.) Figure 1 reveals that 477, or 42.7 per cent, of these children live in single-parent family situations, almost all of which are female-headed. Only slightly over half (52 per cent) live with natural or adoptive father and mother; the remainder are in reconstituted families, most of which are of mother-stepfather type.

FIGURE 1

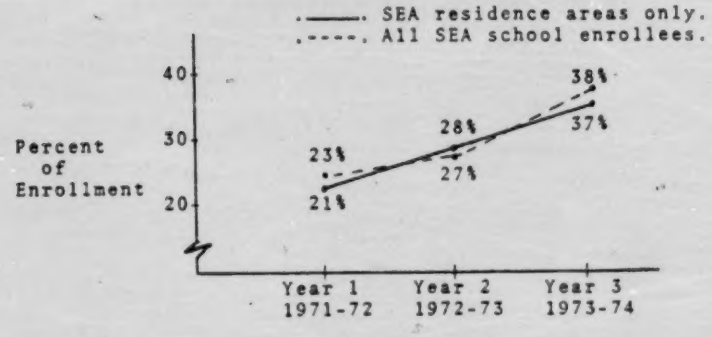
CHILDREN ENROLLED IN SEA ELEMENTARY PROGRAMS
BY FAMILY STATUS

School Attended		Single-Parent Families		Two-Parent Families				Totals
		Female-headed	Male-headed	Father & Mother	Mother & Step-Father	Father & Step-Mother	Double-step Reconst.	
Tuttle	Number	118	4	178	14	0	0	314
	Per cent	37.6	1.3	56.7	4.5	0.0	0.0	100.1
Marcy	Number	140	9	183	9	1	3	345
	Per cent	40.6	2.6	53.0	2.6	0.3	0.9	100.0
Pratt	Number	173	2	207	28	2	0	412
	Per cent	42.0	0.5	50.2	6.8	0.5	0.0	100.0
Free	Number	28	3	12	2	0	0	45
	Per cent	62.2	6.7	26.7	4.4	0.0	0.0	100.0
TOTALS	Number	459	18	580	53	3	3	1116
	Per cent	41.1	1.6	52.0	4.7	0.3	0.3	100.0

The number of single parent families has risen dramatically since the beginning of SEA. Figure 2 presents the pattern of single-parent family growth during the first three years of SEA.

FIGURE 2

PERCENT OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS
FROM SINGLE-PARENT HOMES



(Source: Almen and Rawitsch, 1974)

It will be noted that the single-parent student rate has risen over 5 per cent since project year three. This pattern is consistent with nationwide trends in increased divorce and delayed remarriage (Glick, Current Population Reports, 1975).

The highest frequency of single-parent family children is found at the Free School (68.9 per cent), followed by Marcy Open School (43.2 per cent); Pratt has 42.5 per cent, and Tuttle 38.9 per cent single-parent family children (Figure 1). Comparable statistics on number of families, broken down by school, presents a problem because some parents send children to two or more different elementary alternatives. However, the family distribution with school splitters counted more than once closely resembles percentages for children. Differences in number of students per family between single-parent and two-parent families were negligible.

An important factor in dealing with single-parent family studies is number of children at home (that is, including pre-school and secondary-aged children at home). This number is not available for the universe of SEA families; however, it was computed for the sample of sixty families interviewed (a representative random sample) (Figure 3). The sixty homes had a total of 124 children, or 2.07 children per family, with a range of one to eight and a mode of two.

FIGURE 3

NUMBER OF CHILDREN AT HOME
IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Number of Children at Home	Number of Families by School				Total Families	Total Children
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Free		
1	6	7	4	3	20	20
2	5	9	14	1	29	58
3	0	3	2	1	6	18
4	1	0	0	0	1	4
5	1	0	1	0	2	10
6	0	0	0	1	1	6
7	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	1	0	0	0	1	8
TOTALS*	14	19	21	6	60	124

*Average children at home/family = 2.07

Figures 4 through 8 describe the residential characteristics of the SEA families with elementary students. Three areas, Tuttle, Pratt and Cedar-Riverside, are broken down into "residential" and "public" or communal-type areas. Within the Tuttle area, a new University student housing development has been constructed within the last two years. The Pratt area has one of the city's three public housing projects; the Glendale Project was constructed in the early 1950's. Cedar-Riverside includes Cedar Square West, the first phase

of a long-term high-intensity residential development. (Further development has been tied up by environmental impact lawsuits and financial difficulties of the developer.) Cedar Square is a high-rise apartment complex, while the University housing and Glendale developments are two-story apartment clusters. Glendale and Cedar Square families are heavily female-headed (Figures 4 through 8). "Residential" districts vary considerably in family composition, but substantial numbers of single-parent families are found in every area of Southeast Minneapolis and Cedar-Riverside. The proximity to the University of Minnesota is no doubt partially responsible for the high frequency of single-parent families in this area.

FIGURE 4

RESIDENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SEA ELEMENTARY FAMILIES

Residential Area	Single-Parent Families		Two-Parent Families				Totals
	Female-headed	Male-headed	Father & Mother	Mother & Step-Father	Father & Step-Mother	Double-step Reconst.	
Tuttle — Residential	61	1	123	12	1	0	198
Tuttle — Univ. Hsng.	12	1	24	1	0	0	38
Cedar-Riverside — Residential	13	1	8	2	0	0	24
Cedar-Riverside — Cedar Sq.W.	50	1	11	0	0	0	62
Pratt — Residential	26	0	105	9	2	0	142
Pratt — Glendale Hsng. Proj.	77	1	13	7	0	0	98
Marcy	54	5	59	5	0	1	124
Motley	5	0	6	0	0	0	11
Northeast Minneapolis	6	1	21	1	0	0	29
North Minneapolis	11	0	10	0	0	0	21
South Minneapolis	30	3	45	3	0	0	81
TOTALS	345	14	425	40	3	1	828

FIGURE 5

RESIDENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TUTTLE FAMILIES

Residential Area	Single-Parent Families		Two-Parent Families				Totals
	Female-headed	Male-headed	Father & Mother	Mother & Step-Father	Father & Step-Mother	Double-step Reconst.	
Tuttle — Residential	3	1	81	6	0	0	122
Tuttle — Univ. Hsng.	5	1	9	1	0	0	16
Cedar-Riverside — Residential	3	1	2	1	0	0	7
Cedar-Riverside — Cedar Sq.W.	14	0	4	0	0	0	18
Pratt — Residential	1	0	6	2	0	0	9
Pratt — Glendale Hsng. Proj.	12	0	2	0	0	0	14
Marcy	9	0	17	2	0	0	28
Motley	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
Northeast Minneapolis	2	1	9	0	0	0	12
North Minneapolis	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
South Minneapolis	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
TOTALS	86	4	132	12	0	0	234

FIGURE 6

RESIDENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MARCY FAMILIES

Residential Area	Single-Parent Families		Two-Parent Families				Totals
	Female-headed	Male-headed	Father & Mother	Mother & Step-Father	Father & Step-Mother	Double-step Reconst.	
Tuttle — Residential	17	0	33	5	1	0	56
Tuttle — Univ. Hsng.	5	0	9	0	0	0	14
Cedar-Riverside — Residential	5	0	4	1	0	0	10
Cedar-Riverside — Cedar Sq.W.	14	1	2	0	0	0	17
Pratt — Residential	11	0	22	0	0	0	33
Pratt — Glendale Hsng. Proj.	12	0	3	0	0	0	15
Marcy	30	5	36	1	0	1	73
Motley	1	0	2	0	0	0	3
Northeast Minneapolis	2	0	4	0	0	0	6
North Minneapolis	4	0	7	0	0	0	11
South Minneapolis	16	0	14	0	0	0	30
TOTALS	117	6	136	7	1	1	268

FIGURE 7

RESIDENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PRATT FAMILIES

Residential Area	Single-Parent Families		Two-Parent Families				Totals
	Female-headed	Male-headed	Father & Mother	Mother & Step-Father	Father & Step-Mother	Double-step Reconst.	
Tuttle — Residential	7	0	10	1	0	0	18
Tuttle — Univ. Hsng.	1	0	4	0	0	0	5
Cedar-Riverside — Residential	3	0	2	0	0	0	5
Cedar-Riverside — Cedar Sq.W.	20	0	4	0	0	0	24
Pratt — Residential	12	0	78	6	2	0	98
Pratt — Glendale Hsng. Proj.	55	1	8	7	0	0	71
Marcy	12	0	6	1	0	0	19
Motley	1	0	2	0	0	0	3
Northeast Minneapolis	2	0	8	1	0	0	11
North Minneapolis	3	0	2	0	0	0	5
South Minneapolis	12	1	30	3	0	0	46
TOTALS	128	2	154	19	2	0	305

FIGURE 8

RESIDENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MOTLEY FAMILIES

Residential Area	Single-Parent Families		Two-Parent Families				Totals
	Female-headed	Male-headed	Father & Mother	Mother & Step-Father	Father & Step-Mother	Double-step Reconst.	
Tuttle — Residential	3	0	3	0	0	0	6
Tuttle — Univ. Hsng.	1	0	2	0	0	0	3
Cedar-Riverside — Residential	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Cedar-Riverside — Cedar Sq.W.	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
Pratt — Residential	2	0	3	1	0	0	6
Pratt — Glendale Hsng. Proj.	5	0	0	0	0	0	5
Marcy	3	0	0	1	0	0	4
Motley	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Northeast Minneapolis	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Minneapolis	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
South Minneapolis	2	2	0	0	0	0	4
TOTALS	23	2	11	2	0	0	38

The residence area distribution of the single-parent interview sample is presented in Figure 9. There is general correspondence with the distributions found in Figures 5 through 8.

FIGURE 9

RESIDENCE AREA OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES IN INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Residence Area	School Sample				Totals
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Motley	
Tuttle	4	6	2	0	12
Marcy	1	1	1	2	5
Pratt	3	6	11	2	22
Motley	1	0	0	0	1
Cedar-Riverside	4	2	5	0	11
Northeast Minneapolis	1	0	1	0	2
North Minneapolis	0	1	0	0	1
South Minneapolis	0	3	1	2	6
Totals	14	19	21	6	60

A number of other characteristics were elicited in the interviews. Figure 10 presents the ages of heads of households (persons interviewed) in the sample. The parents ranged in age from 23 to 50, with an average of 33. In general, Tuttle parents were the youngest group, with insignificant differences among the other schools. The interviewed sample was heavily female (Figure 11); this corresponds to the pattern in Figure 4; less than 4 per cent of the single-parent families are male-headed. The sample was heavily composed of divorced persons (Figure 12).

FIGURE 10

AGES OF HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS IN
SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Age Range	School				All sub-samples
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Motley	
Low	23	26	26	24	--
High	39	48	50	37	--
Average	29	34	34	33	33

FIGURE 11

SEX OF HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS IN
SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Sex of Parent	School			
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Free
Female	13	17	21	6
Male	1	2	0	0

FIGURE 12

(NON)-MARITAL STATUS OF HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS IN
SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Status	School				Totals
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Free	
Divorced	10	14	18	5	47
Separated	2	3	2	1	8
Widowed	0	0	0	0	0
Never married	2	2	1	0	5
Totals	14	19	21	6	60

An interesting notation is that there are no widows in the sample; the number of widows and widowers in SEA is very small; because of different attitudes among surviving parents and children in widowed families from those of divorced families, a separate study of families separated by death would be valuable. There are at least two cases in the sample of divorces where the party divorced was not the father of the family's children. Again this subgroup may have

somewhat different characteristics than other families. Of the 55 parents who had ever been married, 47 had been married once, and the remaining 8 were twice married. These parents had been married an average of 8.25 years, with a range from 1 to 24 years. They had been separated an average of 4.1 years.

Transportation is both a problem for single parents and an index of prosperity, since maintaining a vehicle requires a fair portion of one's income. Figure 13 describes the transportation modes used by the interview sample. It will be noted that a number of people used more than one means of transportation. Many who used a car or bus in the winter walked or rode a bike in the spring and summer. Taxis were used by two persons, who were among the poorest of the sample in terms of income. Almost two-thirds used their own cars; several persons qualified this item with: "when it's running." Almost half relied extensively upon city buses. The transportation situation points up the importance of SEA's busing networks (see section VII).

FIGURE 13

MODES OF TRANSPORTATION OF
SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES IN INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Mode of Transportation	School				Totals
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Free	
Own car	10	13	11	3	37
Relative	2	0	4	0	6
Neighbor	0	0	1	0	1
Friends	1	2	2	1	6
Taxi	0	0	2	0	2
Public transit	3	10	10	4	27
Hitch-hiking	0	2	0	0	2
Ex-husband	0	1	0	0	1
Bike	0	2	1	0	3
Walk	0	1	0	1	2

The measure of choosing well, is, whether a man likes and finds good in what he has chosen.

— Charles Lamb

V. USE OF ALTERNATIVES

The alternative system of SEA provides the opportunity for any child in any Southeast residence area or Cedar-Riverside to attend any of the SEA schools. The same opportunity exists for students from outside SEA on a space-available basis, contingent upon a principal's agreement or special transfer. (The latter depends upon approval of the Public Schools Intergroup Education department, to ensure consistency with desegregation guidelines.) Because all of the SEA schools are defined as alternatives, one could argue that all enrollees are users of alternatives. However, since the mode of alternatives use is choice, and without choice, students would most likely attend school in their respective residence areas, we can operationally define use of the alternative system as selection of a schooling option outside of the student's local residence area. Using this definition, it is possible to assess how single-parent family students compare to those from two-parent families across the several schools. Figures 14 and 15 describe attendance at the various alternatives by children from the several residence areas in SEA. (For purposes of these tables, Prospect Park and Glendale are lumped together as the Pratt residence area.)

FIGURE 14

USE OF ALTERNATIVES: NUMBER OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES SENDING CHILDREN TO ALTERNATIVES BY RESIDENCE AREA

Residence Area	School Attended					Totals
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Motley	Seward	
Tuttle	41	22	8	4	0	75
Marcy	9	35	12	3	0	59
Pratt	13	23	68	7	0	111
Motley	2	1	1	1	0	5
Cedar-Riverside	18	20	23	4	33	98
Totals	83	101	112	19	33	348

FIGURE 15

USE OF ALTERNATIVES: NUMBER OF TWO-PARENT FAMILIES SENDING CHILDREN TO ALTERNATIVES BY RESIDENCE AREA

Residence Area	School Attended					Totals
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Motley	Seward	
Tuttle	97	48	15	5	0	165
Marcy	19	38	7	1	1	66
Pratt	10	25	101	4	0	140
Motley	1	2	2	1	0	6
Cedar-Riverside	7	7	6	1	11	32
Totals	134	120	131	12	12	409

In general, a larger proportion of single-parent families elect non-local schools than do two-parent families. Figure 16 breaks out the figures for users of non-local alternatives. It will be noted that 48 per cent of the single-parent families send children to non-local schools, compared to 41 per cent for two-parent families. There is, in fact, a positive correlation between single-parent family status and use of non-local alternatives (Figure 17). A Chi-square calculation supported this correlation at a probability level of .01.

FIGURE 16

USE OF NON-LOCAL ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS
BY SINGLE-PARENT AND TWO-PARENT FAMILIES

Family Status		Residence Area					Totals
		Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Motley	Cedar-Riverside	
Single-Parent Families	Number	34	24	43	4	65	170
	Per cent of total	45%	41%	39%	80%	66%	48%
Two-Parent Families	Number	68	28	39	5	21	161
	Per cent of total	41%	42%	28%	83%	66%	39%

FIGURE 17

USE OF ALTERNATIVES BY
TWO-PARENT AND ONE-PARENT FAMILIES

Use of Alternatives	Two-parent Families	Single-parent Families	Totals
Child(ren) in local residence area only	244	172	416
Child(ren) in non-local residence area	157	167	324
Totals	401	339	740
$x^2 = 7.62$; p. = .01			

Children attending SEA schools from non-SEA residence areas showed a less predictable pattern. Figures 18 and 19 show these enrollments. Students from Northeast Minneapolis are heavily from two-parent families; those from North and South Minneapolis are more evenly divided between one and two-parent families. Seventy-one per cent of non-SEA students attending Pratt school were from two-parent families, compared to 53 per cent for Marcy, 59 per cent for Tuttle, and 14 per cent for Free School. Forty-three per cent of the students from outside SEA are from single-parent families, which compares with 46 per cent from the SEA residence areas.

FIGURE 18

USE OF ALTERNATIVES: NUMBER OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES SENDING CHILDREN TO ALTERNATIVES BY NON-SEA RESIDENCE AREA

Residence Area	School Attended				Totals
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Motley	
Northeast Minneapolis	3	2	2	0	7
North Minneapolis	2	4	3	2	11
South Minneapolis	2	16	13	4	35
Totals	7	22	18	6	53

FIGURE 19

USE OF ALTERNATIVES: NUMBER OF TWO-PARENT FAMILIES SENDING CHILDREN TO ALTERNATIVES BY NON-SEA RESIDENCE AREA

Residence Area	School Attended				Totals
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Motley	
Northeast Minneapolis	9	4	9	0	22
North Minneapolis	0	7	2	1	10
South Minneapolis	1	14	33	0	48
Totals	10	25	44	1	70

We have speculated at length upon the reasons why single-parent families use the alternative system more extensively than two-parent families. A number of suggestions have been offered by single parents for this phenomenon. One is that single-parent family children are more independent and self-sufficient than two-parent families, as a result of their having had to learn to cope, and are therefore more willing to try other options. A second reason offered is that single parents have less choice in residence than two-parent families; because of lower income, they must live where low-cost or subsidized housing is available, and consequently must use the busing network in order to elect a schooling option outside of the local area. Two-parent families are

more likely to be homeowners and also can usually afford higher rents; as a result they have greater opportunity to select a housing site near the preferred school.

Informal intuition (based on knowing the Southeast situation intimately, and the circumstances of many families) has led to the conclusion that both of these reasons are valid, and apply differentially to various individuals and subgroups within the single-parent family population. The housing hypothesis, for example, is most germane to those families residing in subsidized or rental housing developments. Even within this group, there are differences. The residents of Glendale Housing Project elect heavily the local school, Pratt. Most of these people are long-term non-mobile residents, and many would be classed as "hard-core poverty," as compared to the upwardly mobile residents of Cedar Square West or the Como Avenue University Housing development. Cedar-Riverside residents are very heavy users of alternatives; this group is largely composed of University students who are actively engaged in improving their circumstances and could be categorized as "temporary poor." The "independence" hypothesis is probably more applicable to the children of employed parents, and generally those living in single family residential areas rather than multiple residential type developments. Certainly within these generalizations, there is a lot of room for individual family differences; there are very close unified family structures among the very poorest families, and disorganization in some of the more affluent, so it is unfair to stereotype on the basis of general intuitively-based patterns. The problem is one needing more intensive and particularlized research, including some affective instrumentation to correlate schooling decision values with socio-economic and housing variables.

"Reeling and writhing, of course to begin with," Mock Turtle replied, "And the different branches of arithmetic--ambition, distraction, uglification and derision"

— Lewis Carroll

VI. ATTITUDES ABOUT ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

If single-parent families are more extensive users of the alternative education system provided by SEA, a set of attitudinal or affective concerns should be discernible in this community. To get at the values single parents hold in regard to alternative schooling, the interview sample was asked to respond to issues of satisfaction, responsiveness of the school to needs of their children, reasons for selection of alternatives, whether they had changed alternatives, and participation in the schools' programs. Results of these probes are discussed below.

Satisfaction

Parents in the sample expressed overwhelming satisfaction with their choices of alternatives. Fifty-three (88 per cent) indicated that they were satisfied; five said they were not satisfied and two were "not sure." Those who were dissatisfied gave the following reasons: "I'm satisfied with the academic program, but get disturbed with other parts of the process. There's not enough supervision. I'm tired of their losing personal belongings. There's also the problem of distance and trouble at the bus stop." "I feel they're not meeting my child's needs--he has a hearing problem. They had a staff meeting on the situation, but there was no follow-through." "I'm not sure. The teacher is too busy to talk to people; I'm unsure of my child's

reading progress. I would like to see some homework." "Kids don't get enough attention; they're left out if not aggressive." "A change in kindergarten teachers led to discipline problems." "I want some improvement in academics; if not we will change."

Responsiveness of School

Fifty-two (87 per cent) of the parents interviewed said that the schools provided for the needs of their children. Six were negative and two not sure. When asked what was important in this regard, 38 responded positively to "instructional program," 35 to "affective environment," 16 to "Latch-Key" (extended day care for school-aged children), and 15 to "bus service." Other factors mentioned included, "teacher," "traditional school," "freedom to change," "interest areas," "choice of alternatives" (Tuttle); "creative freedom," "exposure to other people and cultures," "choice, but not locked in" (Free School); "parent input," "offering a variety of ideas and courses," "mix of ages in one room," "child taught responsibility, decision-making and to feel good about themselves, to explore new frontiers" (Marcy); "child likes school and the teacher," "the teacher takes time," "success of matching the child with alternatives," "like the interest areas, woodworking," "children are happy" (Pratt).

Fifty-seven persons (95 per cent) said they felt the school was responsive to their children's needs. Reasons given included: "She likes going to school," "Latch-Key and after school programs are good for single-parent families, especially if you're working," "They meet her special physical needs," "My child is happy, but if there are problems, they have conferences to solve them," "Teachers and the administrator are really concerned" (Pratt); "They get kids to like school," "They make provisions for rap sessions for children of divorced parents," "They're sensitive to children, and don't push

maturity," "Teachers consider coopting parents into decisions" (Marcy); "They taught her to read; she doesn't feel left behind," "You're free to communicate with the teacher on any problem," "Teacher awareness of social needs--they look at the child as an individual," "They seem genuinely interested in the child" (Tuttle); "Child can get support for plans and build on learning experience--other schools don't care about learning--just organizing kids into groups," "My child was very quiet, but now gets along with other kids, more stable emotionally," "A small school is beneficial; my child loves the reading teacher" (Free School).

Negative comments were: "They claim to be for the individual, but don't meet the needs of a shy individual" (Pratt); "They need more concern for structure and routine, knowing where kids are; the curriculum doesn't reflect the population of single-parent families" (Marcy); "An exercise in filling out a family tree [kindergarten project] was insensitive to the situation of single-parent families" (Tuttle); "My child wouldn't go to school fall quarter--the alternative lost a lot of energy, but ended up on middle ground" (Free School).

Changers

Almost half (29) of the parents interviewed had children who had changed alternatives. Of these, twenty indicated that the changes had occurred since the parent became single. Reasons for changing varied. Most of those changing to Free School said the previous school was "too structured"; however, one said her child "wanted to be with his friend." Those transferring to Marcy were more varied. One said that Pratt was too competitive; another that Free School didn't keep track of kids; a third that at Tuttle the child had had a violent reaction to pressure and anxiety. Most of the Pratt parents said their

children had been "unhappy" at the previous schools. Similarly, unhappiness was a reason for switching to Tuttle; need for more disciplined and/or directed environment was a reason stated by both Tuttle and Pratt parents.

Selection of Alternatives

Reasons for selecting alternatives varied widely. Figure 20 catalogues the various reasons given by respondents. Philosophy of the alternative was the single most important reason stated, being mentioned by half the sample. Philosophy was very much individually-defined, and there were inconsistencies: "Pratt is more like an old fashioned school than the other alternatives," and "A more traditional school than the previous school (Lyndale)," compared with "I liked an open education school--Pratt is open, with some structure." Marcy parents generally liked the high degree of parent participation, freedom for kids to move around, and non-competitive values; but some said that they "believe in open education," without defining content in very specific terms. "Discipline" and "structure" were commonly mentioned under philosophy by Tuttle parents; however, one said, "There's a balance between control and freedom; too much structure frustrates; Tuttle fits the child's personality." A Free School parent said, "Kids from single-parent families fit better--their life-styles are different, and it's not so structured." On the other hand, a Tuttle parent said, "Tuttle is structured enough, but not too rigid." It is clear that the alternative schools offer philosophic choices, however defined, to match the differences in personal philosophy among Southeast parents. A good match appears to account for the high degree of satisfaction with the alternative schools.

FIGURE 20

PARENTS' REASONS FOR SELECTION OF ALTERNATIVES

Reason for selection	School				Totals
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Free	
Philosophy of alternative	7	9	10	4	30
Recommended by someone	3	6	8	0	17
Child benefits: self-direction, independence, decision-making	0	1	1	3	5
Accommodates individual differences	1	2	3	1	7
Wanted racial mix	0	1	1	0	2
Against traditional schooling	0	5	4	2	11
Child wanted alternative	0	3	3	2	8
Develop creativity	0	1	1	2	4
Stay with friends	0	2	3	0	5
Close to home	4	1	9	0	14
Easy transportation	0	1	0	1	2
Wanted all kids in the same school	0	1	1	0	2
Affective climate	1	7	0	3	11
Former school not meeting needs	4	6	0	0	10

Involvement in Schools

Almost half of the parent sample (26 of 60) said that they were involved in their schools' programs (Figure 21):

FIGURE 21

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

	School				Total
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Free	
Yes	6	10	8	2	26
No	8	9	13	4	34

The highest frequency of involvement was at Marcy. Activities varied by school. Tuttle activities included tutoring, product testing (a PTA fund-raising venture), teaching ceramics for Latch-Key, Latch-Key Advisory Board

(two persons), and PTA Board. However, one mother said she had investigated the PTA and had found it "cold." Three of the six Tuttle parents were involved as a result of Latch-Key. Pratt parents were engaged in volunteering, tutoring, room mothering, the Pratt Advisory Council, the PTA Board, and one was secretary of the Pratt Executive Board. Of the two active Free School parents, one was on the governing board, and the other attended meetings. Marcy had the most variant activities: volunteering, teaching movement and dance, videotaping, script writing, driving on field trips, teaching yoga, teaching massage, family education class attendance, review committee for hiring new teachers, conducting a workshop on creativity, writing for the school, and writing for the SEA newspaper.

A total of 46 parents (77 per cent) said that they would be more involved in the school if they had the opportunity. Forty-three said their situation as single parents placed constraints on involvement. The most significant constraining factor was time (29 responses), with work (12), child care (6), transportation (9), self-concept (2), health (2), single parent playing the roles of both parents (1), and income (3) being other reasons stated.

Assessment of the attitudinal characteristics of single parents concerning alternatives gives a highly positive response, with extensive satisfaction, freedom to choose and change schools, consideration of matching school programs to child's needs and personal philosophies, and a significant degree of parental involvement in the schools, despite perceived limitations due to the single parent's situation.

Money is like manure, of very
little use, except it be spread.

— Bacon

VII. ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Services for the single-parent family come down to two issues--time and money; of time there is either too much or too little, of money there is almost always too little. Because the time issue is integrally related to money (still a slightly obscene word with polite aphorisms, such as salary, expense, stipend, income, etc.), we will be most concerned here with the financial side of services. Money is probably the single greatest day-to-day problem faced by single-parent families; it is further the reason why single-parent families are regarded as a problem to society. Unfortunately, most people, and politicians, still view single parents as a drain upon public resources rather than as a largely untapped resource. The net effect is a sub-rosa caste system which forces many proud people to become long-term wards of the public and makes it very difficult for them to get out of such circumstances.

Services generally equal money because (1) services cost money; and (2) services are necessary because of the lack of money. For single-parents, most of whom are women, lack of money stems from a host of causes: lack of adequate (or often any) child support from the absent parent, inadequate job skills, job discrimination, income discrimination, child care needs, the "tight" job market, and total energy demands of both work and parenting. Most single parents face several of these problems at once. Because money is the root of this evil, our discussion here will begin with an analysis of the financial picture of single-parent families.

Income

The interview sample parents were asked to indicate their estimated income on a scale with $1,500 increments (see schedule in Appendix). Results are presented in Figure 22, "Family Income...." Over a third of the families reported incomes between $3,000 and $4,499, well below the poverty line. Almost two-thirds (37 of 60) earned less than $6,000. The approximate average income was $6,175, a figure inflated by a few relatively high salaries. The Tuttle sample resembled the overall average. Marcy Open School's sample was substantially higher, reflecting a higher frequency of parents holding teaching or professional positions. Pratt's and Free School's samples had considerably lower than average incomes. The Pratt group includes a high percentage of Glendale Housing Project residents who are also AFDC recipients, and the Free School sample reflects generally a counterculture group also with low incomes.

FIGURE 22

FAMILY INCOMES OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES IN INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Income Levels	School				Totals
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Free	
$0-1,499	0	0	0	0	0
$1,500-2,999	1	0	2	0	3
$3,000-4,499	4	4	11	3	22
$4,500-5,999	3	4	3	2	12
$6,000-7,499	2	1	2	1	6
$7,500-8,999	0	5	0	0	5
$9,000-10,499	1	2	1	0	4
$10,500-11,999	1	1	1	0	3
$12,000- over	2	2	1	0	5
Totals	14	19	21	6	60
Approx. Average Income	$6,643	$7,382	$5,179	$4,750	$6,175

The overall income average appears to be somewhat less than that for female-headed households nationwide. An item in the Minneapolis Star recently noted:

> Women-headed families earned more than 120 percent less than those headed by men in 1974, a census bureau survey has found. It showed that average U.S. household income was $12,893 in 1974, with male-headed families earning $14,810 and female-led ones making only $6,683. The male-headed households were 76.4 percent of the total. (Minneapolis Star, March 9, 1976)

It is probable that the slightly lower incomes among the SEA parents reflects the high proportion of university students in the sample.

The discrepancy between incomes of single-parent families and perceived income needs of the general public is even more dramatic. A recent Gallup poll indicates that the public at average believes that a family of four needs a minimum weekly income of $177 ($9,204 annually) to make ends meet. Interestingly, even respondents with family incomes less than $5,000 felt that $149 per week ($7,748 annually) was necessary (Minneapolis Tribune, February 29, 1976). It is clear that SEA's single-parent families are well below the minimum family income perceived necessary for maintenance.

Income Maintenance

Incomes of single parents typically come from several sources: work, spousal support (alimony), child support, public assistance, and family. Figure 23: "Source of Income..." indicates the basis of income maintenance for the 60 families in the interview sample. It is noteworthy that no families in the sample received spousal support and less than a third received child support. Nearly two-thirds (36) reported some sort of work, while over half (31) indicated that they received public assistance. (However, there is a discrepancy between the latter number and Figure 25, which shows 36 families receiving AFDC.)

FIGURE 23

SOURCES OF INCOME OF SEA SINGLE PARENTS IN INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Income Source	School				Total
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Free	
Own work	7	16	9	4	36
Spousal support	0	0	0	0	0
Child support	2	7	10	0	19
Public assistance	9	6	12	4	31
Parent/family help	1	0	1	0	2
Social security	0	2	0	0	2
Dividends	0	0	1	0	1
Total families	14	19	21	6	60

Work

Those persons who work hold a variety of jobs, both part- and full-time. Occupations, by school, are listed in Figure 24. A large number of employed parents are also full- or part-time students at the University of Minnesota; several of the unemployed are also students; many are in non-WIN training tracks pursuing a career objective.

Working hours are highly variable, although most employed parents work daytime hours. For those with pre-school children or who work after school hours, day care is a common problem. A significant number take advantage of Latch-Key (extended day care for school-aged children) at Tuttle or Motley schools, although a number of parents either were not able to enroll their children in Latch-Key because of overenrollment, or were not aware of the program.

FIGURE 24

OCCUPATIONS OF SINGLE PARENTS
IN INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Occupation	School				Total
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Free	
Administrative assistant	1				1
Administrative secretary			1		1
Babysitter			1		1
Bartender		1			1
Bookkeeper				1	1
Child care center director			1		1
Clerical		1			1
Clinical				1	1
Commercial art			1		1
Copy-editor			1		1
Educational evaluator		1			1
Engineering technician		1			1
Executive secretary		1			1
Food processing		1			1
Health manpower researcher		1			1
Hospital consultant		1			1
Instructor	1	1			2
Nurse	2				2
Nursery school head teacher		1			1
Psychiatric technician			1		1
Public information		1			1
Railroad electrician	1				1
Secretary			1		1
Social service worker			1		1
Stock clerk		1			1
Teacher		2	1		3
Teacher's aide	1				1
Teaching assistant				2	2
Waitress	1	1			2
Total employed	7	15	9	4	35

Public Assistance

Public assistance programs are mostly operated through the Hennepin County Welfare Department, although there is an interlocking network of agencies involved in the dispensation and support of services. THus, food stamps are administered by a branch of the Department of Agriculture, some tuition assistance through the University of Minnesota General College's Consolidated H.E.L.P. Center, rent-subsidies through HUD-HRA programs and projects, child-care through State Child-care Facilities Act and Federal Title XX programs, etc. The maze of interlocking and sometimes conflicting programs is such that an individual either must be highly intelligent and resourceful, or have a concerned and helpful eligibility technician, in order to obtain the help to which they are legally entitled. It is small wonder that a good many individuals who are neither very educated nor have proper bureaucratic help simply give up and resign themselves to hard-core poverty.

Figure 25 presents the use by the interview sample of the various public assistance programs. It is significant that two-thirds of the families from Tuttle, Pratt and Free School are AFDC recipients. Only Marcy is low in this respect. Furthermore, the SEA schools are not classed as Title I schools, ranking slightly below (19.36 per cent) the city average (22.34 per cent) in proportion to AFDC families. However, the Title I assignments are based upon two-year-old data; it is possible that SEA would qualify for Title I assistance if current data were used.

Over half (34) of the sample utilize food stamps and nearly half receive some sort of rent subsidy. Most of the latter live in the Cedar Square West high-rise complex or Glendale Housing Project. Sixty per cent (36) receive medical assistance, eligibility for which is automatic for AFDC recipients.

FIGURE 25

USE OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
BY SINGLE PARENTS IN INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Public Assistance Program Used	School				Total
	Tuttle	Marcy	Pratt	Free	
AFDC	10	8	14	4	36
Work Incentive (WIN)	1	0	1	0	2
Non-WIN	4	3	1	1	9
Food stamps	9	8	13	4	34
Rent subsidies	4	8	11	2	25
Unemployment	0	1	0	0	1
Christmas gifts	0	1	0	0	1
Medical assistance	9	8	15	4	36
Child care	3	2	4	0	9
Tuition aid	4	2	2	0	8
Legal aid	0	0	3	0	3
Counselling	1	1	2	1	6
School lunches	8	6	14	4	32
Total families	14	19	21	6	60

The whole area of public assistance is filled with stories of bureaucratic excesses, misrepresentations and intimidation. Knowing where to start unravelling the maze of overlapping and sometimes conflicting programs is difficult. Turf-guarding by competing programs is widespread and rules initially intended to prevent abuses of the welfare system are manipulated by agencies to protect their turf. The net effect is that it is difficult for eligible persons to obtain the assistance to which they are legally entitled and even more difficult for them to get out of poverty circumstances. Public assistance recipients are subjected to a barrage of papers which must be filled out to continue support; they are often harrassed by representatives of one or another agency who use implied threats which probably violate the

spirit, if not the letter, of the law. One mother was recently warned of the dire consequences of failing to register for full-time work by the statement: "We can't take your children away from you, but..." —the alternative was of course the threat of cutting off all support. This individual was already working part-time on an approved work-incentive program and attending college full-time on a training track approved by another agency. Another mother attempted to get off public assistance by applying for a job for which she was qualified--as a social worker in the welfare department of an adjacent county. After scoring high on a written test and doing well in the first part of her interview, she was asked why she needed the job now. She replied that she needed work to support herself and her two children and wanted to get off AFDC. Among the subjective reasons stated for not passing her interview, a member of the examining board stated: "At present, she seems to be looking at welfare largely from her self-admitted position as being a recipient." Yet another mother found the behavior of a work-incentive interviewer to be "insulting." This individual is a white parent of racially-mixed children. The interviewer checked "Caucasian" on the interview form for the "race" of her children. When corrected, the interviewer said, "I thought you said your ex-husband was white!" Response: "He wasn't the father of my children." The mother's reaction was "what difference does it make to them whether your children are black or white?—they still have to be fed and clothed!"

Child Support

As indicated above, relatively few of the families interviewed received child support. Only six families (10 per cent) received child support as a direct payment. Fifteen families (25 per cent) received child support

through Family Services, usually as part of a public assistance grant. (Under AFDC rules, child support payments are usually assigned to the County Welfare Department to defray the basic support allowance.) Sixty-five per cent of the families received no child support. The reasons given were diverse: "My ex is out of the country and they can't collect": "Welfare has been unable to collect"; "He has sporadic jobs and doesn't pay"; "My ex-husband is supposed to pay and doesn't." Those who do receive some child support also report problems, such as sporadic payments, need for court orders, etc.

At first glance, it would appear that a lot of fathers are simply pikers. However, the matter is not that simple. Many mothers do not know where their children's father is, and often would rather not find out. Expecially those not on AFDC who are under no incentive to identify or locate the child's father often do not want to go through the hassle of coercing support payments. One mother stated: "Why should I bother? He couldn't afford it anyway!"

A further issue is that the system generally provides no rewards for paying child support and no punishment for not paying. While the County Attorney's office is nominally charged with filing actions against non-paying fathers, it would appear that they do not get around to many cases. One mother attempted over a two-year period to have her support payments raised from a token amount to a reasonable amount, so that she could get off AFDC. The County Attorney's office refused help; Legal Assistance also refused after a long delay, on grounds that her children were wards of the county. While contempt of court citations are used as a threat, virtually no one is any longer incarcerated for "non-support"--if they were, the jails would overflow!

On the other side the existing federal and state tax structures provide no incentive for those who pay child support; rather the effect is a negative incentive. While alimony payments are allowable tax deductions, child-support payments are not. One who provides more than half a child's support may claim that child as an exemption. But even this does not pay, in strictly economic terms. The exemption is only worth 200 to 250 dollars in actual tax savings, while half the child's support may range from 1,000 to 1,500 dollars. Single persons further pay a substantially higher rate of taxes than do either married persons or unmarried heads of households, and married persons have significantly lower tax rates than unmarried heads of households. While there are incentives for being married and for raising children, there are de-facto penalties in the tax system for supporting children if they do not live in the same household. The only real incentives for an absent parent supporting his children are pride, honor, duty and caring. Financial exigencies combined-with resentment toward one's former spouse can quickly stifle such motives.

Family Support

Only two of the parents interviewed indicated receiving significant financial help from other family members. However, there are a number of families which have close supportive relationships with parents of the single parent, or other close relatives. Kinship ties are relied upon to help in other ways than direct financial support, including shared, cooperative or adjacent housing, transportation, and child care. There are in Southeast several examples of family residential arrangements other than nuclear families, including matrilineal stem (a woman, her children and parents) and matrilineal extended (two or more women, their children and at least one grandparent) families. Additionally, there are several quasi-kin arrangements with the single parent

and her children coresiding with another adult (and sometimes that person's children) of the same or opposite sex. These relationships vary in quality, intensity and permanence, and thus are difficult to judge or categorize in terms of supporting capacity for the single person and his/her children.

School-Related Services

Most of the services are delivered by public agencies. The exceptions are lunch milk subsidies, breakfast programs (recently begun at Tuttle), day care and a variety of other supportive services.

Day Care

Tuttle School began a Latch-Key program in January, 1974, and another opened at Motley School in the fifth year of the project. Latch-Key operates with a combination of parent fees scaled to income and match from the State Child Care Facilities Act, appropriated through the Minneapolis Community Education Department. Minneapolis Public Schools contributes "in-kind" in the form of building space and custodial services. Tuttle's Latch-Key also draws heavily upon the school's community education program for after-school recreational activities and program enrichment (e.g., wood shop and ceramics).

Latch-Key has a before-school session, two half-day programs, one for morning and one for afternoon kindergartners, and an after-school program. Most of the before-school and kindergarten enrollees, as well as many of the full-day students, take advantage of free or reduced breakfasts and/or lunches.

Latch-Key is a highly successful program. Parent reaction is uniformly favorable, and the need for its services is consistently greater than available space and staff can provide. An active parent-advisory group and

dedicated center director have helped to make Tuttle Latch-Key a model for the entire city. When parents were asked whether the schools provide services that help their situation, more of them mentioned Latch-Key than any other category.

Lunch and Breakfast Programs

Of the services offered by the schools, the most widely equivocated appears to be school lunch subsidies. Free or reduced-cost lunches are provided to children on an income-scaled basis. Of the sixty families interviewed, thirty-two indicated taking advantage of the lunch subsidies. (Some would not have been eligible because of income levels being too high.) An independent check of the free and reduced lunch list revealed that almost all of those using the service were children from single-parent families. The reason for the equivocation is not the subsidy program, which is handled efficiently and sensitively by school social workers and lunch clerks. It is rather the quality of the lunches.

School lunches are widely regarded to be singularly unappetizing. They are prepared by machine at a central processing location and packaged in plastic containers--normally two separate containers per child. One is a "cold pack" containing fruit, cold vegetable or dessert; the other is a "hot pack" designed to be heated at the school in a microwave oven. The lunches are delivered by truck to the school daily and dispensed by the lunch clerk. The product is not uncommonly soggy or tasteless in part or entirety. Observation of lunch periods reveals substantial portions of lunches being dumped in garbage cans.

Parents who volunteered comments about school lunches basically told the same story, but reacted in different ways. Some would not participate in the lunch program because their children would not eat them, substituting instead sandwiches from home. This alternative is not preferred by parents because of limited money for the extra food. Other parents said that they had to rely upon the school lunches because they could not afford to send home-made lunches. One such mother reported, "My kids come home at three o'clock and want supper--they're starved! I ask them if they ate their lunches. They way, 'Well, we ate what was edible!'" Another parent suggested offering alternative lunch menus to kids so they could choose not to eat what they didn't like.

On the other hand, a few parents of Marcy and Pratt students suggested that a breakfast program would be helpful. Tuttle School recently began a breakfast program for Latch-Key and low-income children. (Other children may participate at cost.) The palatability of the breakfasts is generally much superior to that of the lunches. As one teacher put it, "It's pretty hard to mess up fresh fruit, milk and corn flakes!"

The lunch situation poses a quandary. School lunches are reasonably nutritionally balanced, provided the child eats all of his/her lunch. The fact that much of the lunch goes in the garbage, however, leaves adequate nutrition in question. In order for a subsidized lunch program to help the situation of low-income families (which most single-parent families are), it should be incumbent upon the school district to provide a lunch which does not discourage children from eating it. At best, the present lunch situation, nutritionally-speaking, represents a form of well-intentioned neglect.

The schools also offer free or reduced-cost milk for low-income children, consumed in kindergartners' milk breaks and at lunch by children who carry lunches. The milk program, when mentioned, received a uniformly positive response, although one AFDC parent said she paid for the milk, feeling that the school shouldn't be responsible; apparently she was not aware that the program was supported by federal subsidies.

Counseling, Social Work and Special Help

The SEA schools operate a coordinated "Student Support Services Team," composed of counselors, social workers and special learning teachers. A number of parents singled out various aspects of these services as helpful. Those at Pratt and Marcy were particularly complimentary of the role of counsellors in helping to deal with problems of their children, and particularly of the accessibility of those specialists: "Psychological help, by taking pressure off girls through counseling, on our custody fight." At Tuttle and Marcy, the social worker (shared between the two schools) received a similar response. Several persons mentioned special learning help for their children: "SLBP relates to the trauma of divorce and parent time [constraints]."

Of particular noteworthiness were special groups conducted at Marcy School by school counselors, social workers and a parent volunteer who works in County Court Services, for parents and children from divorced homes. The group for children, called a "family change" program, was televised nationally. Children were highly responsive and very open about the program: One child was overheard to say, "Are you going to the divorce group today?" This group received special mention by several Marcy parents as helpful.

Several Tuttle parents expressed a need for a group for single parents to share problems and concerns, and one suggested that it would also be helpful to involve the absent fathers in such a group whenever possible.

On the other hand, there were scattered arguments that the schools cannot help single parents, that single-parent families should be regarded, or treated, no differently than two-parent families, and that single is the only way to be.

Bus Service

SEA offers an extensive busing network to transport children from all residence areas to each of the SEA schools. Buses also connect with Cedar-Riverside, Northeast, North and South Minneapolis. A late bus is provided for Latch-Key and after-school activity participants. Most persons who mentioned bus service indicated that they would have difficulty in using the alternative system without it. Because single-parent families are proportionally heavier users of alternatives than two-parent families, this is a critical service.

Bus service is critical to single-parent families not only to facilitate use of alternatives, but also for accessing day care facilities. Without the early and late buses, working parents with children in Latch-Key or other day care centers would have difficulties in maintaining their working hours--they would either be late for work, or have to leave early, or both; or they would be forced to rely upon the expensive alternative of a taxicab. The bus schedule is arranged so that children are transported to the Latch-Key centers from their respective schools (e.g., Marcy and Pratt students who attend Tuttle Latch-Key are collected after school and transported to Tuttle).

Similarly, those who go to before-school Latch-Key are taken to Marcy, etc. Furthermore, students who use other day care services in Southeast or Cedar-Riverside can be delivered to the day care site rather than their homes. Prior to SEA, buses were allowed only to deliver children to the bus stop nearest their homes. Working parents then had the problem of getting their children to day care facilities, which meant often relying upon relatives and neighbors; there were also without doubt a number of children who fended for themselves for two to three hours without supervision. The impact of SEA busing combined with Latch-Key has been a dramatic improvement in the child supervision situation for working parents.

Notwithstanding, one parent pointed out that there is still a serious problem for single parents in that children are sent home for sickness. She said that schools were inclined to send children home for minor illnesses, which caused difficulty for one's work schedule and made it hard to keep a job. She also complained that the schools "always called the mother [parent with custody in most cases] and never the father." This was seen as an unwitting form of sex discrimination. She recommended that the schools provide a lying-in station for children who are not seriously ill, so that they could stay until bus time.

Men give away nothing so
liberally as their advice.

— Rochefoucald

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This is not a neutral study. Various writers have argued that evaluation is an inherently judgmental process, while others have suggested that it should be "value-free." We have followed the former course. This is not to say that we are necessarily partisans of the single-parent family; indeed not all of them agree as to what is true and good! We rather hope to interject some rationality into an area which has long been marked by irrational thinking--both in scholarly publication and public policy.

Single-parent families (or other less neutral terms, such as "broken homes") are often referred to as a "problem." We agree that they have a problem--more correctly, many interlinking problems--but we are not convinced that the single-parent families are the cause of any problem. They are a group as diverse as two-parent families in most respect. They share a certain amount of generalized public stigma, a more difficult time in achieving a prosperous life, and the absence of a marriage partner, the impact of which may vary dramatically from one situation to the next. They are more often poor than well-off financially. They have more difficulties in self-actualization than two-parent families; on the other hand, they learn to confront reality better than many married persons. It is more than a truism that many never grow personally until they are forced to.

We do not have a solution for the single-parent family situation--there is none. We have, however, observed an unusual adaptation of a large proportion of single-parent families to an innovative school system, and through that observation can offer some suggestions for ways of improving the situation of single-parent families.

Alternative Education

We have noted above the high degree of satisfaction of single parents with the alternative system of SEA, and also the fact that single-parent families are more extensive users of non-local alternatives than two-parent families. The reasons are diverse, but a general observation made during interviewing was that parents felt their children were happier in a system in which they could choose, and that this had a positive effect both on academic progress and children's self-concept. While it would not be feasible to support another series of six-million-dollar projects, it would seem that the alternative school system could profitably be expanded much more widely in urban areas to help provide for single-parent families, as well as to help facilitate desegregation and accomplish other social goals through voluntary grouping (e.g., mainstreaming of special education students).

Day Care and Early Childhood Education

The Southeast Latch-Key programs are one of the most successful innovations to come out of the SEA project, even though Latch-Key grew largely out of joint involvement by active parents and school counseling/social work staff. The Latch-Key system has been catching on elsewhere in Minneapolis, but most areas of the city have no access to such a program. A widespread investment in Latch-key type programs would facilitate parental

work and promote educational enrichment and supervision of single-parent children. Any elementary school with 25 or more eligible children should consider adopting the Latch-Key model.

An additional problem of single parents who need or want to work is day care and early childhood education for pre-school children. There are currently far too few openings in existing licensed day care and nursery-school facilities to meet the needs of working parents, without considering those who wish to work and cannot because of dependent children. To meet the demand for such services, preschool day care and early childhood education programs should be established nationwide in the elementary schools. There is substantial support for such a program by major educational interest groups, but the existence of vested interests could result in politicization of goals. The important element is to provide space and programs for children in need, not to provide employment for unemployed teachers--even though that could become an outcome.

Transportation

Systems of alternative schooling such as SEA and Latch-Key type day care systems require the use of buses to transport children to and from their educational and/or day care sites. Most districts already possess extensive busing networks geared to transporting children distant from the school and/or achieving desegregation. Innovation in the development of bus schedules can be used to facilitate alternatives and day care. These are regarded as highly positive uses by single parents, and could have a side effect of improving the image of busing in urban districts. The SEA system could be used as a model for replication in other areas.

Student Support Services

The role of school support services personnel--counselors, social workers, nurses, special education/SLBP teachers--is critical to single-parent families because of the diversity of their needs. Maintaining these roles in the schools to work directly with students and developmentally with teachers is very important. Unfortunately, with widespread cutbacks in school district funding, there is an easy inclination to reduce the student/staff formulas for these support personnel; in terms of overall cost--in both human and economic terms--this may be a false saving. Most districts could operate more effectively with an increase in such specialists. The "problems" of single-parent family children are often headed off early by personal attention from someone experienced in listening to what children have to say and designing programs to help them deal with personal and family difficulties.

Self-Help and Support Groups

A positive innovation in SEA was the development at Marcy School of groups for single parents and for children of divorced parents. This is a low-cost idea which can be run either by school personnel or concerned parent volunteers, or both. Parenting groups to deal with special problems of singles, such as multiple-role playing, economics, self-image, etc., are valuable for adults, and it is clear that parental feelings of self-worth rub off on children. Groups for children help them be open about their situations and to realize that they are not alone in their feelings.

Lunch/Breakfast Programs

Because of economics, school lunch and breakfast programs (especially the subsidies) are very important to single-parent families. Efforts should be made at improving the quality of school lunches, including consideration of the option of hiring school cooks and establishing kitchens where possible. Breakfast programs are needed for many children with working parents, or where the families have little money for food. Every elementary school should investigate the need for a breakfast program.

Economic/Job Rehabilitation

Because most single parents eventually have to work, retraining is an important function. The federally-supported non-WIN program helps but is used by relatively few parents we talked to. One of the very positive factors for Southeast parents is the University of Minnesota's Consolidated H.E.L.P. Center. Parent descriptors for this service are "understanding," and "empathetic," and "the best part of the whole welfare system." This model could profitably be replicated in other areas, through local public universities and colleges.

Incentives for Working

The present system of work incentives for AFDC recipients leaves much to be desired. The basic problem is the incentive allowances are not large enough to enable one to profitably work out of poverty levels without losing AFDC status and the benefits which go with it, such as medical assistance. Two cost-effective solutions would be (1) to raise the allowable income under WIN; and (2) to raise the threshold for medical assistance eligibility.

These actions would serve as an encouragement for working mothers to work their way out of poverty, rather than stay in it.

Employment

Both public and private discrimination exists in the employment of single parents. This is true for both males and females, but more so for females. Part of the reason relates to demands on the time of single parents for parenting, which may cause difficulties with a job. But part is also related to public attitudes about marriage and personal stability. Job discrimination against single persons should be made explicitly illegal.

Legal Assistance

Legal help should be more freely available at no cost to single parents, not only for assistance in enforcing payment of child support, but also for assistance in dealing with landlords, recalcitrant public agencies, wills, name disputes, and other matters.

Child Support

At present there are effective negative incentives for paying child support. The tax structure should be modified to give direct credits against federal and state taxes for child support payments. Such payments eliminate a burden from the public by making unnecessary not only basic AFDC grants, but also the considerable overhead for eligibility technicians, social workers, administrators, etc. A tax credit for child support would be a highly cost effective measure for public revenues. It might well also discourage the high drop-out and desertion note of both divorced and married fathers. Another measure would be to equalize the tax rates for married, single and single-head-of-household taxpayers.

In conclusion

These suggestions are by no means the only possible remedies for problems of single-parent families. They do address parts of the situation and are intended as practical solutions for both educational planners and public policy makers. They go somewhat afield from the area of education--but the problems of single-parent families are inextricably tied to a multiplicity of involvements and environments, home, school, work, public policy on income maintenance, and others.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:
SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY STUDY

Interview Schedule: Single-Parent Family Study

Residence area of family (Interviewer codes):

SEA: Tuttle _____

Marcy _____

Pratt _____

Motley _____

Cedar-Riverside _____

Northeast Mpls. _____

North Mpls. _____

West Area _____

East Area _____

Age of Parent _____

Sex of Parent M _____

F _____

Children:	Sex	Age	School
1)	_____	_____	_____
2)	_____	_____	_____
3)	_____	_____	_____
4)	_____	_____	_____
5)	_____	_____	_____
6)	_____	_____	_____

Residence: Own _____ single family _____

Rent _____ duplex _____

apartment _____

other _____

Rent subsidized? Yes _____ No _____

Transportation: own car _____

relative(s) _____

neighbor(s) _____

friend(s) _____

taxi _____

public transit _____

hitchhiking _____

other _____

Status: divorced _____

separated _____

widowed _____

never married _____

If ever married, how many years? _____

If ever married, how long separated? _____

If divorced, how long since final? _____

Married: once_____more than once_____(# times?)

Income: 0- 1,499 _____

1,500- 2,999 _____

3,000- 4,999 _____

4,500- 5,999 _____

6,000- 7,499 _____

7,500- 8,999 _____

9,000-10,499 _____

10,500-11,499 _____

12,000 & over _____

Source of income:

	per cent
own work	_____
spousal support	_____
child support	_____
public assistance	_____
parental and family help	_____

If working, type of work?_____

working hours (inclusive)? _____

If receiving spousal or child support, is it paid directly_____or through family services_____?

Do you have any problems with support payments?

Yes _____ (what kind?)_____

No _____

If receiving public assistance, which program(s).

AFDC _____	medical assistance _____
WIN _____	child care _____
non-WIN _____	tuition aid _____
food stamps _____	legal aid _____
rent subsidy _____	counselling _____
unemployment _____	school lunch subsidies _____
Christmas gifts _____	other _____

What was your reason for selecting the alternative(s) your child(ren) attend(s)?

		near home	near day care	child's educ. needs	child's social needs		other
Child	1						
	2						
	3						
	4						
	5						
	6						

(state reasons verbatim)

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

(5) _____

(6) _____

Are you satisfied with your choice of alternative(s)? Yes_____ No_____

If not, why not?

_____

_____

_____

Does the offering of alternatives help provide for children's needs?

Yes _____ No _____

What makes a difference?

instructional programs _____

affective environment _____

bus service _____

latch key _____

other day care _____

other factors _____

_____

_____

_____

Is the school (are the schools) your child(ren) go(es) to responsive to (his, her, their) needs?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, how? _____

If no, why not? _____

Have your children changed alternatives? Yes _____ No _____

Since you have been single? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, why? _____

If no, why not? _____

Does the school provide services that help your situation?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, what? _____

Are there services that the school could provide which it doesn't now?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, what? _____

Are you now involved in the school's program? Yes _____ No _____

In what way? _____

Would you be more involved in the school if you had the opportunity?

Yes _____ No _____

Does your situation place and constraints on your (or your child's) participation in school activities?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, what? _____

What would you like to see changed in regard to your child's education?

_____

_____

_____

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